

***STATE OF MAINE ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE
AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 6-12
RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS
1996***

**UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES
CENTER FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY LIFE
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**PREPARED FOR
THE STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL RETARDATION,
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES**

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**THE CENTER FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY LIFE
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A final thanks to the 6,398 sixth through twelfth grade students throughout the state who agreed to participate in this study. They taught us a lot.

State of Maine Alcohol and Other Drug Use An Assessment of Students in Grades 6-12 Risk and Protective Factors, 1996

Prepared for the Maine Office of Substance Abuse
by Dr. Robert Q. Dana and
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HIGHLIGHTS OF STUDY FINDINGS

BACKGROUND

This report presents findings from the Maine Student Drug Survey administered during the academic year 1995-96. Maine is one of six states administering this study, which is intended to assess youth substance use and abuse prevention needs. The survey contains 124 questions asking Maine students in grades 6 through 12 about their use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs as well as about a number of peer, family, community and school factors that may influence abuse behavior.

The eight-page questionnaire was administered by the Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy to 6,398 students, approximately 6% of the 106,916 sixth through twelfth graders in Maine. The participating schools, grades, and students representing all sixteen Maine counties were selected randomly according to a complex sampling design. It was designed to collect information which would advance the current state of knowledge in this arena as well as inform policy, practice and the commitment of resources.

The following is a presentation of the primary findings arranged according to prevalence, and risk and protective factors, with attention to notable differences by grade and gender. The attached report includes additional information in these areas as well as data on: youth violence (e.g., perceptions of personal safety in school and neighborhood, violent activity, acceptance of violence, and carrying a handgun); a comparison of perceived availability of substances by OSA region including a presentation of recent alcohol and marijuana consumption for eleventh and twelfth graders; and a comparison of findings across survey years 1992, 1995, and 1996 for perceived availability, use in lifetime, use in the past 30 days, and excessive drinking by grade and gender.

SELECTED PREVALENCE FINDINGS

Smokeless Tobacco

- ▶ Nearly three times as many boys as girls, for each grade level, *have ever tried* smokeless tobacco.
- ▶ Over 40% of all high school (grades 9-12) boys have tried smokeless tobacco *at least once in their lifetime*.

Cigarettes

- ▶ One-half of all 6-12th graders have *ever* smoked cigarettes.
- ▶ About 68% of 10-12th graders have ever smoked.
- ▶ Fewer than one in ten 6-9th graders and about one out of every six 10-12th graders have smoked heavily (*1/2 pack or more per day*) *in the past 30 days*.
- ▶ Approximately 23% of all 10-12th graders smoke cigarettes *daily*.

Alcohol

- ▶ Approximately 60% of all 7th graders, 70% of all 8th graders, 78% of all 9th graders, and 86% of all 10-12th graders have *ever* used alcohol.
- ▶ About 10% of all 6th graders, 25% of all 7th graders, 36% of all 8th graders, 44% of all 9th graders, over 50% of all 10th and 11th graders, and 60% of all 12th graders have used alcohol *on one or more occasions in the past 30 days*.
- ▶ In grades 6 through 10, boys' and girls' recent excessive drinking is approximately equal: 4% of all 6th graders, 10% of all 7th graders, 16% of all 8th graders, 26% of all 9th graders, and 29% of all 10th graders have *drunk 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row in the past 2 weeks*.

Marijuana

- ▶ Very few 6th graders have ever used marijuana (4%). Over three times as many 7th graders (15%) *have ever used* the substance. About one-half of all 10-12th grade students *have ever used* marijuana.
- ▶ Sixteen percent of all 8th graders, 26% of all 9th graders, and 29% of all 10-12th graders have used marijuana once or more in the past 30 days.
- ▶ About 18% of all 8th and 9th graders and 29% of all 10-12th graders use marijuana once a month or more.

SELECTED PREVALENCE FINDINGS

(continued)

LSD and Other Psychedelics

- ▶ Less than 5% of all 6-8th graders, and about 13% of all 9-12th graders *have ever used* LSD and other psychedelics.

Cocaine or Crack

- ▶ Five percent of all 6-12th graders *have ever used* cocaine or crack in their lifetime. No more than 7% of the students in any grade *have ever used* this substance.

Inhalants

- ▶ An equal or even greater proportion of younger students than their older peers *have ever used* inhalants: 13% of all 6th graders, 23% of all 7th and 8th graders, 22% of all 9th and 10th graders, and about 15% of all 11th and 12th graders *have ever used* inhalants. Little difference was found between girls' and boys' use of inhalants.
- ▶ About 12% of all 7th and 8th graders *have used inhalants once or more in the past 30 days*, while only about 3% of all 11th and 12th graders *have used in the past month*.

Steroids

- ▶ Steroids are used by few boys and girls in any grade. Two percent of all girls and 3% of all boys *have ever used* steroids for cosmetic and/or athletic purposes.

SELECTED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTOR FINDINGS

*A risk-focused approach to youth drug abuse prevention has led researchers and practitioners to give attention to certain "risk and protective factors." The following four factor groupings were used in this report: **Peer-Individual, Family, Community, and School.***

- ▶ Nine percent of 6-9th graders and 25% of 9-12th graders have been drunk or high at school in the past year.
- ▶ About 90% of all 6th graders said it is wrong ("Wrong" or "Very Wrong") for someone their age to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol regularly, or smoke marijuana. Less than 30% of all 12th graders said it is wrong for someone their age to smoke cigarettes or drink regularly, and 53% said marijuana use is wrong.
- ▶ Most (89%) of the 6-12th grade students surveyed said illegal drug use by someone their age is either "Very Wrong" or "Wrong."
- ▶ Fourteen percent of all 6-12th graders said the chances of being seen as "cool" if they smoked cigarettes were either "Very Good" or "Pretty Good." A slightly greater proportion of 6-12th graders (20%) said they would be seen as cool if they began drinking alcoholic beverages regularly (at least once or twice a month); the same proportion (20%) said they would be seen as cool if they smoked marijuana.
- ▶ Most students reported that they try to do well in school (88% of all 6-12th graders), feel it is important to get good grades (89%), and that they want very much to go to college (87%).
- ▶ Seventy-nine percent of all 6-12th graders said that "the rules in their families are clear," and the same proportion said that their families "have clear rules about drug and alcohol use" specifically.
- ▶ A majority of students said that their parents feel it is either "Wrong" or "Very Wrong" for the students (their child) to: drink regularly (defined as at least once or twice a month) - 88%; smoke cigarettes - 88%; smoke marijuana - 94%. Fewer students reported that they (the students) think it is wrong for someone their age to: drink regularly - 56%; smoke cigarettes - 57%; or smoke marijuana 71%.
- ▶ A majority of students (90%) feel safe in their neighborhood.
- ▶ One-half of all students said that there are people in their neighborhood who are proud of them when they do something well, and about as many (47%) said there are people in their neighborhood who encourage them to do their best.
- ▶ Over one-half (52%) of all 6-8th graders and 34% of all 9-12th graders said that if a kid carried a handgun in their neighborhood he/she would be caught by the police.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A VIEW TOWARD THE FUTURE

The recommendations advanced here are opinions based on the expertise of the project's Principal Investigator, Dr. Robert Q. Dana, and further enhanced by these data.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maine students in grades six through twelve use alcohol, tobacco products, and marijuana more frequently than any other category of drugs. **It is recommended** that time, money, and energies continue to be focused on the prevention of these complicated substance abuse behaviors.
2. Results of this study suggest that students believe in school and their teachers. **It is recommended** that schools be encouraged and supported in their current efforts to find solutions to substance abuse problems. Integration of healthy lifestyle, personal empowerment, and anti-drug use messages into the daily curriculum is a viable prevention effort which would not significantly change the school day or overburden already overworked educators.
3. Illegal behaviors and the normative belief structure among youth that "I can do this (behavior) and not get caught" cannot be tolerated. **It is recommended** that illegal behaviors result in arrests or, at a minimum, direct confrontation and a conference with parent(s)/guardian(s). The threat of detection and subsequent punishment is a powerful disincentive to use alcohol, tobacco products, or other drugs.
4. The level of marijuana use by students in grades 6-12 is alarming. While this study does not clarify the causes for this use pattern, **it is recommended** that drug abuse prevention experts continue to confront the "use is okay" messages of special interest groups that advocate the legalization of marijuana.
5. Community agencies, social service agencies, schools, and the Maine Office of Substance Abuse are working diligently to help parents keep their kids healthy, to make our communities healthy, and to reduce the prevalence and frequency of substance abuse by youths. **It is recommended** that funding for prevention initiatives -- spending money to prevent a problem from developing -- continue to be an important priority for the Maine Legislature and the Maine Office of Substance Abuse.
6. Parents and adult role models are a critical force in the lives of young people. Parenting skills training courses, community mobilization and development efforts, and drug education training for parents and students are important resources for Mainers. **It is recommended** that we continue to offer these services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Data collection in studies like this should be planned early in the academic year for administration in the spring. **It is recommended** that efforts be made to coordinate the timing of these studies with other major student-centered research projects such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) studies. Such coordination would avoid problems related to subject availability and holiday/vacation periods.
2. Statewide monitoring and trend analysis of substance use patterns among school age children is of great importance. In order to continue the efforts of this study and also enable in depth trend analysis, **it is recommended** that future evaluation efforts contain questions comparable to those found in this study.
3. In order to broaden the representativeness of the results of the studies, **it is recommended** that future evaluations exert special efforts to include high risk, but frequently neglected, groups (e.g., Native Americans, youths with disabilities, out of school youth, other minority status individuals).
4. In order to widen the utility of the studies, **it is recommended** that future assessments should include a treatment needs assessment component. This would decrease long term evaluation costs by eliminating the need to separately assess treatment and prevention needs.
5. **It is recommended** that schools and school districts be strongly encouraged to take part in these assessments. Active collaboration between schools and researchers can drastically decrease research costs while at the same time ensure the extent to which results may be generalized to the full population.
6. County level sampling is challenging due to the small number of schools in some of Maine's less populated counties. **It is recommended** that data collection occur at the regional level. Regional sampling provides a less costly alternative to county level sampling, and the use of this level of aggregation does not adversely impact the utility of the dataset.

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